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Economic intelligence's contribution to strategic warning of Soviet surprise attack.

ECONOMIC OBSERVATIONS AS WAR INDICATORS *

H. C. Eisenbeiss

The Soviet Union, being the only country with enough military capability to constitute a serious threat to U.S. power, is the principal focus in the intelligence effort to give warning of any deliberate all-out attack on this country. Under prevailing conditions as of the mid-1960's, economic intelligence can contribute to this effort in a number of important ways. The USSR has elaborate civil institutions whose main purpose is to facilitate the transition of the economy from peace to war: they provide for stockpiles of all kinds of goods, industrial and agricultural, and maintain the administrative apparatus needed to integrate industrial and transportation facilities into a military effort. The Soviet civil defense program is already extensive and would undoubtedly be augmented in the event of imminent hostilities. Finally, a variety of economic problems would hinder the Soviets from undertaking the kinds of massive action called for by their military doctrine except after a great deal of advance preparation; the transportation system, most notably, operates at close to capacity under normal loads.

It is true, however, that economic intelligence has a diminishing role in today's early warning process. Under conditions that prevailed immediately before World War II, or even the Korean war, logistics were frequently more important than either weapons systems or tactics, and the potential of economic intelligence for strategic warning was correspondingly great. But as such current military concepts as "zero-reaction-time" long-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads and "instant-ready" airborne armies approach realities, information on the slow build-up of a logistical base contributes less toward determining whether, or where and when, the technically advanced weapon systems are to be used. It is nevertheless to be expected, since the maintenance of "instant readiness" will be very expensive in this era of rapid technical advance, that economic intelligence will continue to be useful for strategic early warning.

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In the USIB Watch Committee's monitoring of war indicators Communist China, though a poor second to the USSR, remains of considerable concern for a variety of reasons. These reasons include a very large army, a regime which sometimes talks as if it considers war an enjoyable pastime, an inclination toward what Mr. Kent calls the "dramatically wrong decision,"[1] its proximity to the Nationalists' offshore islands and Taiwan itself, its Indian adventure in 1962, and the expectation of its eventually producing nuclear weapon systems. Today, however, it not only lacks modern weapon systems, but the ability of its economy to support a sustained effort by its massive but obsolescent ground force is, at best, in doubt. The achievement of a significant modern military capability will require a large and successful industrial program, one as much concerned with production of basic commodities (e.g. high-grade steels and technically complex chemicals) as with military equipment proper. The economic intelligence officer charged with strategic warning of hostile Chinese action against the United States will be preoccupied with the regime's progress toward such a program for some years to come.

Civil Defense[2]*: the MOG*

It could be argued that with present collection capabilities civil defense is the best bet as source for successful strategic warning of Soviet intention to start a big war. Furthermore, it seems probable that the potential for collecting civil defense information of the warning type will improve.

Although the Soviet civil defense program seems to have changed policy several times since the war, and although there are grounds for debate over its exact size and effectiveness, there is no question that it is large; in comparison with those in the West it is enormous, involving millions of people. Whether the current policy calls for urban blast shelters or urban evacuation plus fallout shelters makes no great difference in its value for warning. Either way, the public has to know what it is supposed to do, when to do it, and where to

[1] Said of the Soviet decision to install strategic missiles on Cuba, *Studies* VIII 2, p. 15.

[2] Soviet civil defense has long been a concern of the economic intelligence officer because the present program began as an integral part of the postwar reconstruction of the Soviet economy. Today the Ministry of Defense and other institutions are heavily involved in the program, but the role of economic institutions also continues to grow.

go. The best of security is not likely to conceal even the earliest of the massive public actions that go with the declaration of a "special period" of possible imminent hostilities. Urban evacuation, moreover, presently an integral part of Soviet policy, requires several days.

The program is as complex as it is large, and it appears to stipulate detailed procedures for every part of Soviet society. These details are one of the reasons that it offers good opportunities for the collection of strategic warning information. In Moscow they include such seeming minutiae as relocating to the suburbs fire engines stationed in the central city, removing national treasures (probably including Lenin's body) for safekeeping, preparing for window-by-window blackouts, and probably even making "final disposition" of carnivorous, poisonous, and obstreperous residents of the zoo. So long as persons friendly to the United States can move about in Moscow, we have simple, inexpensive, and reliable collection devices—such as an embassy wife airing the heir—to give us the crucial information on implementation of civil defense procedures.[8]

A *Moscow Observer's Guide*, assembled by the National Indications Center, covers the possibilities for simple physical observation at times of crisis. The MOG was used during the Cuban missile crisis, and in retrospect it can be said to have proved a useful tool. One defect in the performance was notable, however: an ominous sign—distribution of gas masks before the eyes of U.S. personnel on one of the upper floors of the Foreign Ministry building—was reported by the highest priority cable, whereas reports of negative indications—neither Lenin nor the live inhabitants of Moscow, neither fire engines nor ferocious animals ever left their normal quarters—arrived by slow boat, or not until personnel returning to Washington underwent an end-of-tour debriefing. Next time it would help to know in Washington which items in the MOG had been checked and which of these conveyed "no information," which were normal, and which ominous.

Prospects for increasing the MOG type of emergency collection appear to be improving. There is now an Indian consul stationed in Odessa; his cooperation would double (from 1 to 2) the cities covered. Then if a U.S. consular office opens in Leningrad the coverage could be tripled.

[8] The simplicity, economy, and reliability of embassy wives emerges from comparison with other intelligence systems, not other wives.

Disaster Columns

Paramilitarized relief and recovery columns based in rural areas under the civil defense program offer another possible set of indicators. The task of these "disaster columns" is to move into a nuclear-devastated urban area and attempt to assist the injured, limit damage, and restore or salvage what they can. They are to get their personnel mostly from the farms, their transport and earth-moving equipment from farms and from construction projects. Similar city units to be evacuated in an emergency draw personnel and equipment from factories, utilities, and service groups. Both the Soviet press and secret intelligence suggest that the rural relief columns have not yet developed much beyond the planning and organization stage, but there has been recent public exhortation to increase efforts to equip and train them.

We have no source with a demonstrated ability to observe and report promptly an alerting of the disaster columns. Still, collection possibilities seem fairly good. The columns will directly involve large numbers of people. And if alerted they would disrupt the activities of even larger numbers by their claims for equipment on farms and construction activities. Thus the immediate task is to determine the procedures prescribed for the disaster columns as they are organized and trained, so that emergency collection requirements and means to meet them may be established.

The foregoing discussion may suggest that the prime task in day-to-day observation of the Soviet civil defense system is measurement of its alertness for near-term use. In fact, it is not. Although portions of the system have been alerted and exercised, there is no evidence of any national exercise having been staged, even one of a command-post type. The most widely held (but not necessarily the best) guess at the reason for this apparent shortcoming is that the Soviet population has a proclivity to read too much between the lines and might react in ways that would hurt, for example panic buying.

Over the years, in support of the National Indications Center and the Watch Committee, economic analysts have charted the slowly growing capabilities of the civil defense apparatus. They seek the answers to such questions as: "Does the disaster column program have a readiness date? Does it require the diversion of resources from some other user? How effective will the columns be?" In order to answer such questions as well as possible the collection and

analysis of data on civil defense developments must be a day-to-day process rather than one concentrated on periods of crisis.

The overwhelming majority of the answers have, in NIC jargon, been "negative." That is, we have never (Cuban crisis included) discovered an urgent effort to achieve early readiness, peak at a given time, or otherwise meet a specific target date. It appears rather that the Soviet regime believes civil defense to be a necessary part of the balanced economic and military power base of the state which, like the other parts of that base, must more or less keep pace with general progress.

Suppression for Surprise?

What of the possibility of a surprise attack plan which omits any direct pre-action alerting of the civil defense apparatus? Summarily, such a plan is considered to be unlikely. Even if we ignore the strategic military reasons for using the civil defense system, whatever its capability (as well as the even more cogent military reasons for not meditating an attack at all under the present balance of forces), there remain a number of considerations against it.

Civil defense is an integral part of Soviet power. In some areas, when a regional military authority has conducted an air defense exercise, the regional civil defense mechanism or some part of it has also been exercised. The military authority can do this because civil defense is now a military responsibility. The regional military commander is trained to consider civil defense another of his many tools. Consequently, it appears that a decision to omit civil defense would be administratively as complex as a decision to cancel participation of aircraft in an air defense effort and leave the job entirely to missiles.

The military commander, however, does not bear sole responsibility for civil defense. The party, the economic bureaucracy, and the civil government each has its own responsibilities, chain of command, and interlocking liaison with respect to it. In order to omit civil defense from a surprise strike plan, positive instructions to prevent the execution of standing operating procedures would thus appear to be necessary at a multitude of geographic locations—would need to go to party officials, military officers, civil government bureaucrats, and managers of factories, and would need to go to many levels in each of these hierarchies. With so many people involved, the planners of the strike have a problem: would the security of the surprise be well served by an attempt to leave out civil defense?

Most important is the probability that the party leaders would not accept a military plan which excluded civil defense participation. One totally unacceptable result of such a plan might be the decimation or worse of the party while the military leadership remained relatively unimpaired. Another consideration of the Presidium ought to be the reaction of the surviving members of the populace, as well as of the party, if available civil defense facilities had not been put to use.

Above all, the party leaders remember the effects of World War II on Soviet industry and the prodigious logistic efforts required to fight the war and afterward to rebuild the economy and restore the culture. Even now the demographic effects of World War II present problems of labor force and military manpower. It is these memories and the dangers of nuclear warfare, not charity, that have caused the party leaders to expend the money, effort, and manpower to create a civil defense organization, along with strategic reserve and industrial mobilization systems.

To sum up, the Soviet civil defense program involves millions of people in a multitude of tasks. It is considered a basic component of national power, and there are strong reasons for expecting it to be activated even in connection with a planned surprise attack. Current collection systems are relatively inexpensive and reliable, and they are capable of timely reporting on the activation of at least some part of the system. Prospects for this reporting appear to be improving rather than diminishing. Let us now look at indicators in other economic fields that can be monitored with existing collection capabilities.

Transportation: Pre-attack Moves

Because the Soviet transportation system is usually operating at close to capacity, a major increase in military movements would disrupt normal traffic patterns. The operation of the system is consequently of great interest for strategic early warning. Moreover, because the bulk of transport is concentrated in rail facilities, the Soviets are concerned that the existing system might not give them the flexibility and service they would need after a war had begun, and schemes to remedy the projected shortcomings are probably also of value in pointing to possible indicators.

These propositions are not just wishful thinking on the part of U.S. intelligence officers. The July 1961 issue of the Soviet journal

Military Thought (secret edition) contained an article which discussed military transport in much this light. The author was quite concerned lest the West be tipped off to any imminent action against NATO by the total disruption of normal freight when reinforcements were moved to the western front. He proposed, in order to allay this danger, that a large proportion of normal movements be continued and the reinforcement trains mixed in as a minor part of total rail activity over several weeks.

From the Soviet viewpoint the problem of concealing this westward reinforcement of the ground armies, a necessary action under the "balanced force" concept, is complicated by the difference in gauge between Soviet and European railroad tracks. At each border crossing point, paired tracks of the two sizes parallel one another in order to facilitate train-to-train transloading. These transfer yards have grown slowly but steadily, and some now reach many miles both east and west of the Soviet border.

Surveillance of the routes, crossing points, and yards in the western USSR and abutting parts of eastern Europe should reveal by direct observation the reinforcement of the armies facing NATO. For indirect acquisition, information useful to the strategic warning process should be available to a number of railroad men, bureaucrats in economic administration, and plant officials on both sides of the border. These people would quickly be aware of an either general or partial embargo on civil freight or passenger traffic, and many of them could determine whether it resulted from military usage of the system.

Wartime Capability

Soviet military planners also appear to be much concerned about the difficulties their transportation system will face in providing the required service after the start of a war. A variety of measures intended to strengthen it have been proposed, some of which would offer opportunities to collect early warning information. Because some of the measures could also serve purely economic ends, however, both collectors and analysts must treat them with care.

A central organization for the control and direction of all forms of transportation would increase the efficiency, flexibility, and recuperability of the Soviet system. With central direction, priority freight could be more rationally shuttled among various routes and carriers

and around bottlenecks and damaged facilities; repairs could be organized in better accord with national priorities. The intelligence officer concerned with strategic warning therefore watches constantly the administration of Soviet transport. Centralization, subordination to the Ministry of Defense or a supraministerial body, and military staffing of either the operating or directing levels of transportation administration are considered possible moves that would have meaning for early warning.

A wide range of physical improvements in peacetime have also been suggested as means to strengthen the wartime capacity of Soviet transport. At one end of the range these consist simply of more facilities, especially of kinds other than railroads—more pipelines, more and better roads, improved canals, and more double tracking. Less grandiose proposals are for road and rail bypasses around cities, alternative bridging, and extension of Soviet-gauge track farther into eastern Europe. Proposed emergency measures include road trailers to move rail cars across breaks in rail lines, stocking of reconstruction materials in the vicinity of probable Western priority targets, and last-minute evacuation of transportation equipment from target areas.

We do not know which of these proposals might be implemented in preparation for an anticipated war. Economic development requires that some of them—the "Friendship" oil pipeline into eastern Europe, for example—be acted on without particular regard to their military utility. Others, particularly evacuation of transport equipment from target areas, would be either very expensive or so disruptive of normal military and civil activity that they are unlikely. But if evacuation did occur, it would be an unmistakable sign that large-scale hostilities were imminently expected.

Finally, in addition to land transportation, the intelligence officer must follow Soviet merchant shipping and civil aviation. Normality in the deployment and occupation of the merchant marine has been a comforting phenomenon during past crises. Sometimes the Soviets have moved ships out of an area of immediate danger, but they have not put them in safe havens. If they really mean business one would expect them to move at least some ships to home or friendly ports. As to aviation, almost as many high-performance air transports are operated by Aeroflot as by U.S. air carriers. These planes plus the military air transports provide a substantial airlift potential, and so any unusual activity in Aeroflot needs to be identified.

Thus transportation, like civil defense, should be featured in a list of activities that under existing collection capabilities could provide useful, perhaps conclusive, strategic warning information.

Strategic Reserves

Over the years the Soviets have quietly created a vast and expensive system for maintaining strategic stockpiles. It is administered unobtrusively and with unusual care from Moscow by the Chief Directorate of State Reserves, apparently directly responsible to the Council of Ministers. Its object is support for a war effort. It was used for the initial effort in the Korean war.

For this purpose the Directorate administers and operates stores of foodstuffs, raw materials for industry, semiprocessed materials, finished manufactures, medical supplies, fuels, spare parts, construction materials—some of almost everything. It is not the only operator of storage facilities in the Soviet Union: the Ministry of Defense has depots; factories and distributors hold limited inventories; economic and political administrative institutions keep some stocks. But State Reserve inventories are probably by far the most important. They were designed, for example, to enable the economically deficient eastern littoral of the Soviet Union to operate for extended periods without the aid of the vulnerable Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Under Khrushchev the rules governing the withdrawal of materials stored in the facilities of the Directorate were relaxed to allow use in easing the effects of natural disaster and economic abnormalities—in June 1964 Tass noted that farmers lacking seed were being supplied from state reserves. But the primary purpose of the system—strategic reserve for war—remains. Withdrawals from stock are not a routine bureaucratic procedure; high officials must rule on each individual release and approve the replacement schedule. Accounting procedures, including physical inventory, are apparently stringent. The refreshing process, putting old stores into service and replacing them with newly procured goods, seems to be pursued with care.

As long as the Chief Directorate of State Reserves exists it must be presumed to have a role in any Soviet plan to start a large war, and it may have one to play in limited war. In recent years, however, the value of this knowledge to the indications process has been slight because the intelligence community lacks a source for timely and detailed information on actions of the institution. The USIB's Economic Intelligence Committee reaffirmed in 1964 that development of such

a source is one of the first-priority requirements for economic information. Prospects for filling this requirement are uncertain.

Industrial Mobilization

Another unique Soviet institution (or perhaps set of institutions) is designed to coordinate the efforts of industry and transport in filling wartime military needs. It is most easily explained in terms of the pre-1957 economic administration because there was information on its operation then. Prior to 1957 the Soviet government ran the economy through a series of ministries based in Moscow; there was an oil ministry, an aircraft production ministry, an ocean fleet ministry, etc., sometimes close to fifty of them. Each ministry was subdivided into departments, some functional, like supply or finance, some product-oriented, e.g., fighter aircraft production, and some geographical, as eastern area oil exploration.

Now each ministry had also a military affairs office called the "Military Mobilization Department," and the administration of each factory, railroad section, river fleet, or other activity had a similar subdivision under one of a variety of names—mobilization section, special department, secret department. These two, the ministry department and the factory department, had a number of different responsibilities, depending on the kind of ministry or facility it was in. For example, at plants which had been converted after the war to the production of agricultural implements instead of small arms and ammunition, the responsibility of these departments included maintenance of an ability to switch back to arms—the required equipment, limited quantities of raw materials, and personnel with the right skills. Another responsibility was to keep track of the draft status of the employees in order to assure that quotas for draftees and for skilled production personnel would both be met. It was the factory departments that handled classified documents at the plant level.

Like all Soviet institutions, these were required to submit many reports. The instructions for some of the reports, which have come into the hands of U.S. intelligence, clearly assumed that these units would be deeply involved in the Soviet actions precedent to initiation of any major military action. In some instances they were the channel through which the civil defense readiness of the plant was reported to the ministry in Moscow and would have been the channel for reporting the effect of enemy military action on the plant. The intelligence officer concerned with economic activity in the Soviet Union

presumes that these units will continue to play a considerable part in any Soviet preparations for war.

Again, as reflected in the 1964 updating of EIC priorities, the intelligence community needs a source. In at least one of the few economic ministries that retain more or less their pre-1957 form, the units continue to exist and to function. Soviet attitudes and procedures being what they are, the continuity of the system would be assumed without any evidence at all, but there is some indication that units at the factory level also continue to exist. A source is now needed for much more basic information than the alerting of the system. We need to reidentify its parts and rediscover its procedures after the constant shuffle of industrial administrative bodies since 1957. Prospects for such a source do not appear very bright.

The four activities discussed above (strategic reserves, the industrial mobilization system, civil defense, and the transportation system) are the ones that the economic intelligence officers in CIA consider the most likely to be productive for indications purposes. They are the fields that are kept under constant review for the National Indications Center, subject of course to what the quantity and quality of reporting are at any given time. The list of four, however, by no means exhausts the economic phenomena from which early warning indicators may be derived. Indeed, they may not even be the most important.

General Economic Activity

At least some economists turned intelligence officers believe that their most important contribution to the warning process is the continuing analysis of the totality of Soviet economic policy; they believe that a Soviet decision as important as to go to war will be reflected in a variety of broad economic developments. These might include great changes in the share of investment resources going to support military activities, in the division of construction activities between projects offering a relatively quick return and those having a slow return over a very long period, in the proportion of total goods available assigned to people for consumption and to industry for investment opposed to that available for military forces, in the way the annual addition to the labor force is divided up, and in the assignment of priorities among the various claimants in the economy.

Other intelligence officers, including economists, arguing that data on general economic policy is too imprecise to be of great value for early warning, point out that conclusions reached in the last 10 years

or so via this route have regularly been that the Soviet Union is hell-bent for peace. The fact that there has been no global war in this period does not demolish the objection: in late October of 1962 economists involved in intelligence were not likely to be making arrangements for a winter vacation in southern Florida, even though the evidence from Soviet economic policy suggested that it would be reasonable to do so.

Strictly, it can be claimed only that the total economic picture should tell us what the potential enemy ought to be considering if he is rational, not what he will necessarily do. The Chinese Communists, for example, would be unable at present to sustain a massive military operation over an extended period, but Mao and friends might still start one. At times, nevertheless, the total economic view can be fairly conclusive. In late 1963 and up to Khrushchev's fall in 1964 a variety of sources, secret and public, have given evidence of a Soviet economic policy so clearly reflecting peaceful intent that it should prevail even in the face of fairly strong contrary evidence.

In practice, the National Indications Center and the Watch Committee have been interested in Soviet economic policy only as background for the week-to-week examination of more direct indicators. Though this practice may seem to neglect an important part of the total picture, there are valid reasons for limiting broad economic policy to a background role. The information on which judgments about this policy are based is more often than not obtained from open Soviet sources and is therefore subject to manipulation by the Soviets. It also requires interpretation, which can be a long and involved process, and frequently it is not timely enough for indications purposes. Material in open sources becomes available when the Soviet publisher is ready, not when the economic intelligence officer needs it.

Bottleneck Intelligence

Under this heading one can collect the unending flow of reports on shortages of particular kinds of equipment and materials in the Communist world. The warning watchman is traditionally interested in the bottleneck because it might reflect a diversion of the commodity in question from normal to military use ("Lucky Strike 'green' has gone to war!"). A typical example might be the periodic Soviet shortages of petroleum products, generally diesel fuel or bunker oil. The bottleneck report of a commodity specialist is generally his most frequent contact with the indications process. All such reports are carefully reviewed for indications implications.

The commodity specialist himself, however, is not likely to consider bottleneck intelligence a very useful input for strategic warning. Because the Communist economies are continually trying to get from available resources the maximum output and because these resources frequently do not stretch as far as the planners had scheduled them, shortages are a permanent part of all economic systems like the Soviet. The specialist might even find it more disturbing if all references to shortages among the commodities he watches disappeared from the Communist press; the disappearance might be a reflection of tightened security, which in turn might suggest some dark intent. Moreover, a confirmed or admitted shortage in a commodity which he had estimated to be in good supply might move the analyst rather to question his previous estimates, all too often based on inadequate sources, than to suspect a diversion to military usage.

Most investigations of bottlenecks as indications turn out like one made at the request of a congressional leader who had been told that the Soviet purchases of Canadian and U.S. grain reflected very high military consumption of alcohol (industrial) rather than a crop too small to feed the population. The gist of the intelligence reply was that even if Soviet military use of alcohol exceeded U.S. military use by 10 times it would still consume only about three percent of Soviet alcohol output, far too little to require large grain imports.

In the light of his experience the commodity analyst thus properly looks first to the economy rather than to hostile intentions for the explanation of all shortages. Even when he cannot find an economic explanation he remains reasonably sure that there must be one. That he still looks carefully for indications implications in each new shortage does credit to his integrity, for he feels like a man examining clams for pearls.

And Others

A myriad of other possible economic events might theoretically provide valuable indications information, but limits on collection capabilities and on the ability to generalize from fragmentary information (like data on one activity at one facility at one point in time) severely reduce the logical possibilities.

A large "unknown" area in the potential utility of economic intelligence for strategic warning is covered by the items in the General Indicator List which refer to relocation of plants, increased output in armament plants, and changes in the pattern of industrial output. The validity of such indicators and to some extent the prospects of

collecting information on them would depend on what assumptions were made as to the kind of war plan the USSR might settle upon. There is little precedent in the history of such activities to serve as a guide for early warning; some redirection of economic effort occurred during (but not before) the Korean war.

In practice, there are only a few additional economic areas of occasional concern, even as background, to the NIC and the Watch Committee. Economic developments in the GDR are of considerable background value for strategic warning. In particular, the level of interzonal trade has over the past several years been a good gauge of the intensity of Communist feeling on the Berlin issue. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the Group of Soviet Forces Germany could be put to extended use without the support of the GDR railroad net, which is sometimes hard pressed to handle normal loads and therefore could not move greatly increased military traffic without cutting off its civil customers.

The varying priorities accorded Communist agriculture are also of background value. For an extreme example, the periods when significant number of troops are engaged in digging potatoes or moving wheat seem unlikely to bring war. At other times the Soviet Union is involved in one of its chronic reorganizations of economic administration (such as that being prepared in the fall of 1962), with inevitable disruptive effects on command, output, and supply flows, aggravated by infighting for position in the new scheme. That such a reorganization is in progress does not preclude war, of course, but it does indicate strongly that the possibility of war is not preempting the undivided attention of party and government leaders.

Construction projects are of occasional concern in early warning. Information on important projects is sometimes available with little time lag, and analysis of the purpose, priority, and cost of the effort may then be of significance.

Finally, merchant shipping and related information provided in late July and early August of 1962 the initial indisputable evidence of a drastic modification in Soviet policy on Cuba. On 29 August the Watch Committee concluded that "at the least, recent deliveries indicate a significant Soviet effort to improve the defensive military capabilities of the Cuban regime." This conclusion was made possible primarily by the collectors and collators of information on commercial maritime shipping. Were the Soviets again to try such a build-up in an overseas location, shipping information might again provide strategic warning.